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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 000189

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FOR NEA/ELA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [KDEM](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: JORDAN'S ISLAMISTS BATTLING OVER THE FUTURE OF THE
MOVEMENT

REF: A. AMMAN 140
[B](#). 07 AMMAN 4111
[C](#). 07 AMMAN 2668

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#). (C) Disarray within Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood (MB) continues to be aired in the public sphere. Since its drubbing in parliamentary elections on November 20, the Islamic Action Front (the MB's political arm) called on an MB member of the Jordanian Senate to resign; the MB Shura Council disbanded itself; and the IAF Secretary General was referred to an internal disciplinary review board for comments criticizing the decision to take part in the elections in the first place. Despite the disarray, the MB and IAF were able to gather a few thousand demonstrations on December 14 after Friday prayers in downtown Amman to protest what they called the "Gaza siege," and have used the visit of President Bush to rally support among the MB faithful while lashing out at Embassy Amman. Its efforts to regain public support notwithstanding, yet-to-be-released IRI polling data confirms what the election results indicated: support for the Islamist movement is down (Ref A). End Summary.

[2](#). (U) Note: The Jordanian MB and IAF together are what is generally called the Islamic movement in Jordan. The Jordanian MB is a registered "society" (with an equivalent status to that of the lawyers' and doctors's syndicates) under Jordanian law. The IAF - the MB's political party - is registered as a political party. While the IAF and MB are legally separate entities, the IAF is subject to decisions of the MB Shura Council and MB Executive Office. The head of the MB in Jordan is Controller General Salim Al-Falahat and the head of the IAF is Secretary General Zaki Bani Irsheid. End note.

Post-Election Dirty Laundry on Public Display

[3](#). (C) Following pre-election displays of internal fissures (ref B), the Islamic movement has continued to air publicly its internal tensions following the November 20 election that saw the IAF's share of seats in the lower house of Parliament plummet from seventeen to six.

[4](#). (C) In a rather dramatic mea culpa, the MB Shura Council dissolved itself due to "the council's realization that there was a mistake in assessing the situation," i.e. in deciding whether to participate or not. The Shura Council dissolution prompted calls from various Islamist quarters for the resignations of Jordan's MB leaders, including MB Controller General Salim Al-Falahat, and the sole MB member of the appointed Senate, former MB Controller General Abdalmajed

Al-Dhunaybat (who is not an IAF member).

15. (C) IAF Secretary General Bani Irsheid was among the most strident of the voices retrospectively criticizing the decision to participate and calling for resignation of MB or IAF members from Parliament. The MB Executive Bureau and Dhunaybat separately responded to Bani Irsheid by telling him to desist and essentially mind his own business. Bani Irsheid and outspoken critic Muhammad Abu-Faris (himself a former MP) were also referred to an internal Islamic movement disciplinary panel in December for investigation of their decisions to not take part in IAF campaigning (reportedly due to their dissatisfaction with the moderate-laden IAF candidates list). After a few weeks of cooling off and apparent internal deliberation, the referral was withdrawn in early January.

16. (C) The so-called MB moderates have thus far won the debate over IAF/MB representation in Parliament: the Islamists have stayed in. Lower house of parliament Speaker Abdulhadi Al-Majali told Ambassador on January 14 he was surprised at this outcome, implying that the IAF's election losses made it too politically weak to give up the platform provided by Parliament.

Positioning for the Internal MB Election

17. (C) The new MB Shura Council is to be determined in late February or early March through elections held within the 25 MB branches across Jordan. Upon approval of those results by the Executive Office, the 25 victors form the new Council.

18. (C) The Council election comes at a significant point in

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the Islamic movement's internal recalibration. Embassy contacts and Islamic movement watchers in the press suggest that the public bickering is part of the pre-election battle for influence. The next council and a potentially new leadership of the MB will define the shape of the MB's relationship with the state, as well as the IAF's political priorities, for the next several years. This election will again pit the so-called doves of Falahat against the hawks of Bani Irsheid. Note: While the doves v. hawks analogy is used by the Jordanian press, key senior GOJ leaders and emboffs do not see a significant difference between their policy positions - only in their demographics and relationship with the GOJ. The doves tend to be older, nationalistic East Bankers who are closer to the government and more responsive to the King; while the hawks are younger, more ideological Islamists, often of Palestinian origin, who tend to be openly anti-regime, anti-American, and viewed by the security establishment as crypto-Hamas supporters. End note.

IRI Poll Confirms Loss of Support

19. (C) The new MB Shura Council will have to face the gradual downward trend of the IAF's popularity. While the IAF has sought to portray its election losses as a function of government vote-rigging, yet-to-be-published IRI tracking and exit polls have confirmed a general downturn in support for the IAF country-wide, with only 7.6 percent support nationwide (ref A). In fact, the IAF received about seven percent of the vote on election day, November 20. Note: In the 2003 parliamentary election, the IAF earned 16.4 per cent of the total vote. End note.

110. (C) As described ref C, the IAF loss of support has many possible causes, including Jordanians turning away from extremism due to the November 2005 terrorist attacks and the distasteful Hamas coup in Gaza, followed up by the subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle linking of the IAF to Hamas and Al-Qaeda by the GOJ and other commentators. A counter-argument made by some contacts regarding the IAF

losses is that the IAF's moderate-laden candidate list was too moderate for the more hard-line MB grassroots. This argument, however, fails to account for the consistent decline in IAF support suggested by IRI tracking polls prior to both the municipal and parliamentary elections in 2007.

¶11. (C) Lower house Speaker Majali agrees with the assessment that the IAF is losing support. He told Ambassador on January 14 that choosing Bani Irsheid to head the IAF was a mistake on the part of the MB because he is too extreme for generally moderate East Bankers and Palestinian-origin Jordanians, who are "happy in Jordan." He pointed out that the IAF does very well for itself in Jordan, and its followers are therefore unlikely to upset the political balance because they know from their experiences in other Middle Eastern countries that the axe can fall quickly and severely.

Efforts to Reclaim Public Support

¶12. (C) Despite - or perhaps because of - the squabbling, the MB and IAF are wielding traditional bread-and-butter issues in an attempt to regain public support and close ranks to the extent possible. They drew a few thousand protesters in downtown Amman on December 14 to protest the "Gaza siege," with both MB and IAF leaders taking part in the demonstration. They have also continued to put forward their claims that the November elections were unfair, with IAF Deputy Secretary General Irhayl Gharaibeh on January 12 calling the two 2007 elections "the biggest democratic massacre in the history of Jordan." The IAF has also showed its continuing displeasure with the GOJ by rejecting in mid-January an offer to take part in a dialogue for political parties from the Minister for Political Development Kamal Nasser. Comment: The IAF claims of parliamentary election tampering have not gained the same public sympathy as those made after the July 2007 municipal elections. A recent poll by the Jordanian Center for Strategic Studies revealed that sixty-six percent of respondents felt that the parliamentary elections were free and fair - compared with thirty-three percent who felt that the municipal elections were free and fair. End comment.

¶13. (C) Carping about Israel and U.S. support for it is also a traditional means by which the Islamists can ensure their continued relevance and visibility, with the latest effort on that front being criticism of President Bush's just-concluded visit to the region. Gharaibeh on January 11 called on Jordan to reject descriptions of Israel as "the Jewish state"

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and "to stick to the Palestinian people's right to an independent and sovereign state" as well as the right of return of refugees. Bani Irsheid echoed that sentiment, criticizing the visit as one intended to activate "destructive chaos" and the "incitement of sedition" among Palestinian and Arab ranks.

Lashing out at the U.S. Embassy

¶14. (C) In another apparent attempt to curry favor with the hardliners within the MB, Bani Irsheid lashed out at Embassy Amman on January 14 through the IAF's website, www.jabha.net. In a posting picked up by Al-Ghad daily newspaper, he said that the Embassy "violates Jordanian sovereignty by its persistent interference in (Jordan's) internal affairs." Bani Irsheid accused the Embassy of quashing democratic reforms and rehashed false accusations of the Embassy encouraging tribal sheikhs to band together against the IAF.

Comment

¶15. (C) While the internal deliberations of the Islamic

movement remain largely opaque, the struggle between the two factions is real. The outcome is far from a foregone conclusion, however. The failure of the IAF's moderate list in November and the Shura Council's dissolution could give the hardliners under Bani Irsheid an opening. Fears of such an outcome may account for the MB Executive Office's decision during the first week of January to withdraw its referral of Bani Irsheid to the internal review panel. A "trial" of Bani Irsheid now would have worked against efforts to buttress unity in the Islamic movement and could have given Bani Irsheid's supporters a convenient platform to display their ideological purity in the battle for election to the Shura Council. That said, the Jordanian Islamist movement faces an uphill struggle in its efforts to win public support. The internal spats and public displays are in effect a struggle for support from the MB grassroots, not from Jordanian society at large. While early indications are that the MB and IAF might become more hawkish with the MB Shura Council election, IRI polling data and the election results suggest that society is becoming less so, perhaps setting the stage for further weakening of IAF and MB in terms of overall support in Jordanian society.

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